DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 380 929 EC 303 803

AUTHOR Denny, George S.; Carson, Ellen K.
TITLE Perceptions of Campus Climate for Students with Disabilities.
SPONS AGENCY Arkansas Univ., Fayetteville. Dept. of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations.
PUB DATE [Jul 94]
NOTE 38p.; Funding also received from the Office for Campus Access at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accessibility (for Disabled); College Students; *Disabilities; *Educational Environment; Higher Education; Interaction; Peer Acceptance; *Peer Relationship; Perception; Physical Mobility; Social Attitudes; *Social Behavior; Social Integration; *Student Attitudes; Student Personnel Services; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Attitudes toward Disabled

ABSTRACT

Forty-one college students with disabilities were surveyed to obtain their perceptions of how other students, faculty, and staff view them and to collect data about the accessibility of the university campus. A majority of the students surveyed believed that others viewed them as capable. Approximately one-fourth felt that others responded to them in a supportive manner, and one-half believed that others responded as if the disability did not matter. An 11-statement scale (the Positive Social Attitude Scale) was developed to measure subjects' perceptions of other students' interaction with students with disabilities. The scale identified social behavior as the strongest factor in explaining variance. Subjects who had a more positive perception of others perceived less resentment from others. Subjects' comments from an open-ended section of the survey questionnaire are presented, focusing on recommendations to encourage acceptance and increase social contact for students with disabilities. Recommendations include faculty modeling of positive behavior in interacting with students with disabilities and increased use of cooperative work in classrooms. Decreasing physical barriers is also believed to increase social interaction by improving access to university-sponsored events (via bus service expansion, for example). (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 380 929

Perceptions of Campus Climate for Students with Disabilities

George S. Denny

Educational Foundations

University of Arkansas

Ellen K. Carson

Department of Nursing

Pittsburg State University

Address Correspondence to:

George S. Denny, Educational Foundations

247 Graduate Education, University of Arkansas

Fayetteville, AR 72701

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George S. Denny

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RUNNING HEAD: Campus Climate

EC 303803

Acknowledgments

Support for this project was provided by the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations and by the Office for Campus Access at the University of Arkansas. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the students in the Fall 1993 Survey Research Seminar to this project.

Abstract

Students with disabilities were surveyed to obtain their perceptions of how other students, faculty and staff view them and to solicit input about the accessibility of the university campus. A questionnaire was mailed to 192 students identified by the Office of Campus Access as having disabilities, 41 responded. A majority of students with disabilities believed that others viewed them as capable. Approximately one-fourth of subjects felt that others responded to them in a supportive manner, and one-half believed others responded as if the disability did not matter. Positive Social Attitude Scale revealed a single factor, social behavior, as explaining 42% of the variance in the scale. Subjects that had a more positive perception of others also perceived less resentment from others. The majority of the respondents believed that academic demands provided the greatest obstacle. Recommendations to decrease social barriers included faculty modeling positive behavior in interacting with students with disabilities. Decreasing physical barriers would increase social interaction by improving access to university-sponsored events. Education of faculty and improved dissemination of information about services for students with disabilities would support success in the university setting.

Perceptions of Campus Climate for Students with Disabilities

Much has been done to make university campuses accessible to students with disabilities. Barriers of physical access have come down, yet social barriers remain. Other studies have investigated the attitudes toward people with disabilities, both of other students (Brillhart, Jay, & Wyers, 1990; Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Satcher & Dooley-Dickey, 1992; Barrett & Pullo, 1993) and students with disabilities (Fichten, Amsel, Bourdon, & Creti, 1988; Fichten, Robillard, Judd, & Amsel, 1989).

Many researchers have found that students without disabilities have positive attitudes toward people with disabilities (Gillies & Shackley, 1988; Brillhart et al., 1990; Houck et al., 1992), and in some cases even more positive than students with disabilities (Fichten et al., 1989; Barrett & Pullo, 1993). Even if other students do not see themselves as having social barriers toward students with disabilities, social distance or avoidance remains a problem so long as students with disabilities perceive barriers from other students and faculty/staff.

Some of the distancing attitudes that other students and faculty/staff may have toward students with disabilities are resentment of the special accommodations, reluctance to involve them in activities, avoidance, pity, and uncertainty in how to

relate to them (Siller, 1976). This study describes how students with disabilities believe other students and faculty/staff view them.

Instrument

A questionnaire was constructed to determine the views of students with disabilities. The form consisted of five sections:

1. Forced-choice items where students with disabilities were asked (a) how they think other students perceive the capabilities of students with disabilities, (b) how other students respond when they find out about the disability, (c) the area where they face the greatest obstacle (academic, physical, or social/psychological), and (d) how they summarize their own thoughts about their disability.

2. On a scale ranging from 1 = "Never" to 5 = "Almost Always" how often they perceive a series of favorable and unfavorable behaviors and attitudes in other students.

3. A series of agree/disagree statements about their own attitudes and how they think other students view them.

4. Demographic questions about their age group, gender, time of onset of disability, and the nature of their primary disability.

5. Open-ended questions asking for written recommendations about what would encourage acceptance and increase social contact for students with disabilities.

Sample Studied

Questionnaires were mailed in October 1993 to all students served by the Office for Campus Access at the University of Arkansas. Of the 192 forms mailed out, 41 were returned for a disappointing response rate of 21%. The responding group was comprised of a higher proportion of non-traditional students than the general student body; 68% of the sample was over 25 years, whereas 24% of the general student body is over 25 years of age. The majority of the respondents were ages 20-39 (66%). The sample had a higher percent of females (54%) than the general student body (46%). Nineteen (47%) subjects were male and 22 (54%) were female. Twelve (29%) subjects had the disability since birth, 6 (15%) experienced onset during childhood, 8 (20%) since adolescence and 15 (37%) became disabled in adulthood. Table 1 lists the nature of the students' disabilities .

Insert Table 1 here

Results

Subjects were asked to rate other students' beliefs about the capabilities of those with disabilities. Twenty-two (54%) stated other students considered students with disabilities as having the same capability, whereas 19 (46%) believed other

students considered students with disabilities less capable. None of the subjects responded that other students considered students with disabilities as more capable.

Other students' reaction to students with disabilities was also sought from the subjects. Six subjects (15%) stated that other students reject them when they find out about the disability. Eleven subjects (28%) stated that others responded in a supportive manner and 23 subjects (58%) stated that other students responded as if it did not matter.

A large portion of subjects (51%) believed that the academic area provided the greatest obstacle at the University; eleven (27%) selected physical obstacles as the greatest and six subjects (15%) selected social/psychological obstacles as being the greatest. Three subjects did not respond to this question. See Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Chi-square was used to compare groups based on subjects' response to the area that presented the greatest challenge, academic, physical or social/psychological. No significant difference in groups was found when age and gender were

crosstabulated with the obstacles. When the obstacles and onset of disability groups were compared, group differences approached significance ($p = .05322$).

Students with disabilities were asked to summarize their thoughts about their disability. A list of eight options was provided to solicit this information. The largest portion (27%) selected "a continuing challenge" as best describing their disability. Many subjects (17%) chose to describe their disability as "a fact of life". Equal numbers of subjects (15%) summarized their disability as "an inconvenience" or "a cause of frustration". Fewer numbers selected "an opportunity" (7%) or "a source of strength" (5%) as best describing their thoughts about their disability. Table 3 depicts the responses of the subjects' thoughts about their disability.

Insert Table 3 here

An eleven-statement scale was developed to measure subjects' perceptions of other students' interaction (Positive Social Attitude Scale) with students with disabilities. The scale was created by incorporating ideas from the literature and other sources. Items were phrased both in positive and negative terms and negatively worded items had scores reversed. Responses ranged from "never" (1) to "almost always" (5) on a 5-point scale. The sample range of scores was 2.09 to 4.82 with a

mean of 3.90 indicating that subjects tended to have a more positive outlook. No significant differences in scores on the Positive Social Attitude Scale were found between genders or groups based on age.

The scale was analyzed for internal consistency for this sample. Coefficient alpha was 0.8496, indicating a high level of internal consistency for this scale. Factor analysis of the 11-item instrument followed. A principal components analysis was employed to determine the number of hypothetical factors. Using Kaiser's criterion of using unrotated factors that have eigenvalues of greater than 1.00 for rotation, three factors were extracted and rotated, explaining 66.7% of the variance.

Factor 1, social behavior, is the strongest factor explaining the greatest percentage of variance (42%) and having the highest loadings. Factor 2, helpfulness, was the next extracted factor that represented 13% of the variance. This factor contains items focusing on assistance or help being offered to students with disabilities. Factor 3, pity, accounted for 12% of the variance. The items loading heavy on this factor represented reactions as fear and pity. Table 4 lists the items included in the Positive Social Attitude Scale and its factor loadings and structure.

Insert Table 4 here

Six items in the questionnaire asking about feelings of resentment were extracted and entitled "Resentment Scale". Table 5 displays the items included in the Resentment Scale. Two positively worded items in the scale were reverse scored for the instrument's measure of resentment. Reliability analysis was computed for these items resulting in an alpha of 0.7175. The two scales, the 11-item Positive Social Attitude Scale and the 6-item Resentment Scale, were negatively correlated at a significant level ($r = -0.7114$; $p < .01$).

Insert Table 5 here

Remaining items included in the questionnaire are presented in Table 6. Especially interesting is that over one-fourth (27%) of the subjects perceived that other students believe that students with disabilities receive a greater portion of university-provided services. Nearly one-half (49%) of the subjects believe that other students think students with disabilities have learning problems. This reinforces the notion that students may need additional education regarding the educational needs of students with disabilities.

Insert Table 6 here

The questionnaire also included a section for written responses. On one item, subjects shared ways to encourage other students to accept those with disabilities. Respondents believed that others' being open-minded, friendly, willing to cooperate and learn in equal relationships would best promote acceptance. Needed classroom accommodations and special equipment should be welcomed with a "cooperative attitude". Table 7 presents categories of responses and representative quotes for each category.

Insert Table 7 here

Faculty and staff can best encourage acceptance of persons with disabilities in similar ways. Accommodating special needs in the classroom and equal treatment were primary themes in subjects' remarks. Faculty and staff could also improve by becoming better informed about campus services that are available and sharing this information with students. A few subjects believed that when faculty take the time to work more closely with the student with disabilities, this improves acceptance, perhaps

by modeling positive behaviors to other students. Table 8 displays the question and subjects' responses.

Insert Table 8 here

The subjects were asked to suggest ways the university could increase social contacts for students with disabilities. Table 9 presents these responses. One specific idea was to improve access to university sponsored events by extending the bus schedule to weekends and evenings. Some campus buildings are still not easily accessible to students with mobility difficulties. Subjects expressed the view that educating others would improve acceptance in social settings and that student groups could be formed to assist with social outreach in the campus community. A surprising reaction from the subjects was rejection of the idea that the university should be involved in providing social contacts for students with disabilities. Perhaps this is a perception of the researchers that students with disabilities require assistance with their social needs. The inclusion of this open-ended question may reveal some preconceptions on the part of the creators of the questionnaire.

Insert Table 9 here

The final open-ended question asked for general comments about the issues brought forward in the questionnaire. Comments focused on access problems, the impatience of others in dealing with students with disabilities and the visibility of the subjects' disability. See Table 10. Certainly these responses provide more evidence that some basic and continuous education of individuals in the needs of persons with disabilities is required.

Insert Table 10 here

Discussion

The results indicate that students with disabilities perceive a positive attitude from other students and faculty/staff. Subjects believed others regarded them as equally capable and tended to treat them in a supportive manner. Subjects viewed

others' behavior in their presence and the absence of fear as important indicators of a positive attitude.

Subjects suggested that acceptance of disabilities could be enhanced by cooperative work in the classroom and by others' modeling acceptance through friendliness and assisting with special accommodations required in the classroom or on campus. Modeling appropriate behavior by faculty was seen as an avenue to enhance acceptance of students with disabilities. Further, it was recommended by the subjects that faculty be better informed about the services provided through the university for students with disabilities.

Although many physical barriers on campus have been eliminated, respondents believed that many remained. Some buildings had access ramps that were too steep. Handicapped parking spaces were not near certain buildings. Bus service expansion was one method suggested to increase social contacts for the physically challenged student.

A recurring theme in responses of the subjects was that education about disabilities was needed. Others needed to be better informed about services provided for students with disabilities, that services did not represent "special" favors, but are required tools for success in the university setting. Academic demands were seen as the primary obstacle, yet physical disabilities and learning disabilities are neither

synonymous or mutually exclusive. Education about disabilities would dispel myths and stereotyping that remain in our society.

References

Barrett, K.E. & Pullo, R.E. (1993). Attitude change in undergraduate rehabilitation students as measured by the attitudes toward disabled persons scale. Rehabilitation Education, 7, 119-126.

Brillhart, B.A., Jay, H., & Wyers, M.E. (1990). Attitudes toward people with disabilities. Rehabilitation Nursing, 15(2), 80-85.

Fichten, C.S., Robillard, K., Judd, D., & Amsel, R. (1989). College Students with physical disabilities: myths and realities. Rehabilitation Psychology, 34(4), 243-255.

Fichten, C.S., Amsel, R., Bourdon, C.V., & Creti, L. (1988). Interaction between college students with physical disabilities and their professors. Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, 19(1), 13-20.

Gillies, P. & Shackley, T. (1988). Adolescents' view of their physically handicapped peers--a comparative study. Educational Research, 30(2), 104-109.

Houck, C.K., Asselin, S.B., Troutman, G.C., & Arrington, J.M. (1992). Students with learning disabilities in the university environment: a study of faculty and student perceptions. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 25(10), 678-684.

Satcher, J. & Dooley-Dickey, K. (1992). Attitudes of human-resource management students toward persons with disabilities. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 35(4), 248-253.

Siller, J. (1976). Attitudes toward disability. In Rusalem, H. & Malikin, D. (Eds.). Contemporary Vocational Rehabilitation (pp. 67-80). New York: University Press.

Table 1

Numbers and Percentage of Subjects' Nature of the Disability

Nature of the Disability	Frequency	Percent
Learning Disability	17	42.5
Orthopedic/mobility	13	32.5
Deaf/hard of hearing	6	15.0
Visual/blind	6	15.0
Medical disease	6	15.0
Head Injury	4	10.0
Emotional/psychological	3	7.5
Speech/communication	1	2.5
Other	1	2.5
Total	57*	142.5

* This number is larger than the sample because subjects had more than one disability.

Table 2

Forced Choice Items, Frequency and Percentage

Item	Response	N	%
Other students consider students with disabilities as:			
	just as capable.	22	53.7
	less capable.	19	46.3
	more capable.	0	0
	Total	41	100.0
When other students find out about my disability, they respond:			
	with rejection.	6	14.6
	in a supportive manner.	11	26.8
	as if it doesn't matter.	23	56.1
	No response	1	2.4
	Total	41	100.0

(table continues)

Item	Response	N	%
The area in which I face the greatest obstacles is:			
	academic.	21	51.2
	physical.	11	26.8
	social/psychological.	6	14.6
	No response	3	7.3
	Total	41	100.0

Table 3

Phrase best summarizing thoughts about disability

Phrase	N	Percent
A continuing challenge	11	26.8
A fact of life	7	17.1
An inconvenience	6	14.6
A cause of frustration	6	14.6
An opportunity	3	7.3
A source of strength	2	4.9
A great tragedy	0	0
Other (please specify)	0	0
No response	6	14.6
Total	41	100.0

Table 4

Factor loadings and factor structure for the Positive Social Attitude Scale

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
-Seem uncertain how to behave in your presence	0.81787	-0.28223	0.06297
-Seem afraid of your disability	0.77484	-0.04165	0.45339
Interact positively with you	0.76578	0.24302	-0.31640
-Avoid interaction with you	0.76334	-0.08166	-0.21802
Treat you as an equal	0.72560	0.32843	-0.06157
-Blame you for your disability	0.70072	-0.23730	0.31392
-Seem to resent accommodations you receive	0.64400	-0.24918	-0.33585
Ask for help	0.63791	0.43883	0.13817
-Joke about you	0.51095	-0.37714	-0.42457
Offer help to you	0.27908	*0.72954	0.20391
-Pity you	0.16887	-0.37351	*0.70345

* Item loading highest in Factor 2 and 3
- Negatively worded items, reverse scored.

Table 5

Items included in Resentment Scale

Seem to resent accommodations you receive.
-Other students are receptive to accommodations I need in the classroom.
-My professors are receptive to accommodations I need in the classroom.
Other students think that students with disabilities receive more than their "fair share" of university provided services.
Students with disabilities are viewed by other students as having an unfair advantage in taking tests.
Other students resent special parking spaces for students with disabilities.

-Items were reversed scored so high score represents increased resentment.

Table 6

Survey Statements and Responses in Percentages

Statement	Yes	No
Other students are receptive to accommodations I need in the classroom.	80.5	19.5
My professors are receptive to accommodations I need in the classroom.	80.5	19.5
The accommodations I receive meet my needs in the classroom.	85.4	14.6
Other students know about my disability.	65.9	31.7
I have been invited to work with other students.	61.0	39.0
I have just as many friends as other students.	63.4	36.6
Other students treat me differently because of my disability.	19.5	75.6
It is obvious to others that I have a disability.	14.6	85.4
Other students think that students with disabilities receive more than their "fair share" of university-provided services.	26.8	65.9

(table continues)

Statement	Yes	No
Other students choose their words carefully when they are in my presence.	7.3	92.7
Students with disabilities are viewed by other students as having an unfair advantage in taking tests.	19.5	70.7
I am able to perform daily activities as well as most other students.	73.2	24.4
Other students think that students with disabilities have learning problems.	48.8	43.9
I am satisfied with my campus experience.	58.5	34.1
Other students resent special parking spaces for students with disabilities.	31.7	65.9
Other students seem open to having close friendships with students with disabilities.	63.4	34.1
I am a person of worth.	100.0	0
Sitting next to a student with a disability causes anxiety for other students.	39.0	58.5

(table continues)

Statement	Yes	No
Other students think that students with disabilities are overly sensitive.	34.1	65.9
Other students are willing to go out with people with disabilities.	53.7	39.0

Table 7

Responses to "What should other students do to encourage the acceptance of persons with disabilities?"

Statement	Number of Responses
Treat them the same as other students.	15
- "Other students should begin by treating students with disabilities as they would anyone else."	
- "Let other students know that we are basically just like them."	
- "Persons with disabilities are really no different than they, we have the same emotions, we go through life as they do, only with a little more of a challenge or obstacles."	
Learn about and understand the disability.	7
- "Ask questions about the disability so they can understand it better and offer support."	
- "Distribute information in Freshman orientation."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
Be friendly and include in student groups.	6
- "Just be friendly and talk to them. Do not talk down to disabled students."	
- "Involve students with disabilities in other students' social activities."	
- "Include them in study sessions."	
- "Do not be afraid to talk to them or about their disability."	
- "Pick them for projects."	
Be open-minded about the potential and abilities of persons with disabilities.	4
- "They should show respect and encourage self-worth and value of the disabled."	
- "Acknowledge the person's disability."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
Assist with and understand classroom accommodations.	2
- "Make room for taping equipment or whatever accommodation is necessary and do it with a cooperative attitude."	
- "In class, they should be encouraged to assist the disabled person out."	
No Comment	9

Table 8

Responses to "What should University faculty/staff do to encourage acceptance of persons with disabilities?"

Statement	Number of Responses
Equal treatment	11
- "Equal treatment in all areas not related to the disability. Too often special accommodations extend to unwarranted privileges."	
- "Don't make a big point of it."	
- "Treat them like any other student. Don't make a big issue of their disability, but don't ignore them either."	
Assist in accommodating special needs.	10
- "Make accommodations without making disparaging remarks!'	
- "Consider accommodations as a means of equalizing opportunities instead of viewing them as concessions."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
- "Overheads are a big problem for individuals with visual impairments or upper extremity impairments. Handouts would be helpful here."	
- "Try to be considerate of physically disabled persons on field trips."	
- "If you need something, you normally get it."	
Learn about disabilities and services provided on campus.	8
- "Learn more about the disability so they can better prepare to offer support or accommodations."	
- "They need to learn more about the services offered for disabled persons."	
- "Read up on information about students with learning disabilities. Not every L.D. student is dyslexic."	
- "Educate your faculty and staff and you will solve 80% of L.D. student dissatisfaction."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
Create a close working relationship.	2
- "Work with them more."	
- "Anonymity Keep the teacher -disabled student relationship on a personal level."	
No Comment	10

Table 9

Responses to "What specifically should the University do to increase social contacts for students with disabilities?"

Statement	Number of Responses
Nothing.	7
- "I would find it highly patronizing if the University were so presumptuous as to facilitate my socialization."	
- "We should require students with disabilities to take greater responsibility for their own participation."	
- "I think that's not the responsibility of the University."	
- "I find my social contacts within my regular classroom environment."	
Provide better access to University sponsored events.	6
- "Provide services to events on campus. Students on campus can volunteer to aid the disabled students wanting to attend lecture, plays, concerts."	
- "Make social gatherings accessible."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
- "Transportation is a problem for social occasions, so maybe expand bus service to evenings/Saturdays."	
- "Be sure that all activities are accessible to the disabled and that proper parking facilities are located nearby."	
Provide social/support groups.	6
- "Offer programs that encourage contact with people with disabilities."	
- "Have support group meetings involving those with disabilities in order to plan ways to become more involved with each other and within the student body as a whole."	
- "Try to set up help programs with other students so that they won't feel alone like they're the only one with that problem."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
Educate others about students with disabilities.	5
- "Set up programs for other students to find out about the disabilities or pamphlets on different disabilities for better understanding."	
- "Enlighten the student population that physically disabled doesn't mean socially unacceptable."	
Don't Know	4
No Comment	13

Table 10

Subjects' Comments Concerning the Issues Raised

Statement	Number of Responses
Increase campus access/ decrease physical barriers.	6
- "Sidewalk ramps are too steep for wheelchair."	
- "The new pre-registration was a big help."	
- "There are many building barriers and social barriers present on campus."	
Disability not visible.	4
- "My disability is not easy to perceive, however, this fact makes the accommodations I do receive seem unwarranted and maybe envied."	
- "I don't look like a person with a disability."	
- "My handicap is emotional, so it is hard for me to feel accepted in class when I have to ask people to move so I can set up equipment."	

(table continues)

Statement	Number of Responses
Others could be more helpful.	2
- "No one wants to walk slower or wait for a slow person with a disability."	
No Comment	21